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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN INTEREST IN SUDAN, AND AFRICA, DRIVEN BY NATURAL RESOURCES

Classified By: Acting Political M/C David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian interest in Sudan is driven by a desire to access the country's natural resources, according to Russian analysts who are skeptical of Moscow's intention of being drawn into the difficult negotiations that will be necessary to reach a settlement between the Sudanese factions. This interest in tapping natural resources extends beyond Sudan to all of Africa, which explains GOR interest over the past few years in expanding Russia's level of engagement with various countries on the continent. The analysts question the credentials of Mikhail Margelov, who was recently appointed the Russian President's special envoy to Sudan, contending that he is not a professional diplomat with experience in Africa, but was chosen for this assignment largely for his public diplomacy skills and ability to work well in the West. End summary.

¶2. (C) Analysts Yevgeniy Satanovskiy of the Middle East Studies Institute and Georgiy Mirskiy of the Institute of Higher Economics told us in separate conversations that Russian interest in Sudan was driven by an interest in the country's natural resources. Satanovskiy contended that there was a belief within the GOR that an end to the fighting and instability in Sudan was necessary to unlock access to the oil, gas, and minerals in Sudan and neighboring countries. Sending the Russian President's special representative, Mikhail Margelov, to the region could help lay the groundwork for Russian economic activity, while also giving the appearance that Russia would play a role in reaching a peaceful settlement between the Sudanese factions.

Vladimir Shubin of the Institute of African Studies agreed that Russian interest in Sudan, as well as Africa as a whole, was driven by commercial interests. He pointed to the April 5-9 visit to Moscow of Democratic Republic of Congo FM Tambwe, which was heavy on discussions of collaboration with Russia in the mining and energy fields. In a public statement following his April 7 meeting with Tambwe, Russian FM Lavrov highlighted the economic potential in enhanced ties with the DRC, "a country rich in natural resources." He said that Russian companies were interested in working with their Congolese partners "in virtually all areas."

¶3. (C) Shubin questioned Moscow's ability to fully exploit energy and mineral deposits in Africa. Russia may already be too late to access resources that have been sewn up by China, which has scored success through its long-term activity on the continent. The GOR did not show an inclination to commit significant resources to its activities in Africa, or deliver aid to countries there, when Russia was in a strong economic situation. With the recent economic downturn, Shubin thought it doubtful Russia would begin doing so now.

¶4. (C) Satanovskiy told us that his and other think tanks in Moscow were consulted by Margelov before he set off on a January trip to the region that was meant to mark Russia's entry into high-profile African diplomacy. He believed that Margelov, who is Chairman of the Federation Council's

International Affairs Committee, was given the job of special envoy over a professional diplomat largely because he is well known in the U.S. and Europe. Another factor may have been that as an "Arabist," Medvedev assumed Margelov was familiar with North Africa, although Satanovskiy thought that the situation in Sudan and Darfur was distinct from the Maghreb that Margelov knows from his previous experience in that region. Mirskiy questioned Margelov's ability to serve as a knowledgeable representative of Russia in Africa, and said he believed the legislator was chosen for the job because he "seems like an American" and gets along well in the West. Satanovskiy understood that Margelov had Medvedev's backing to convene an international conference on Sudan in Moscow in September or October. The Institute for Contemporary Development, an economic-oriented think tank headed by Medvedev confidante Igor Yurgens, would be the host.

BEYRLE